

Dear editor

The Advocate's July 19 article by Mike Dunne, "LSU report raises N.O. landfill concerns," was prompted by a press release from the Louisiana Environmental Action Network. The article cites a report by John Pardue of LSU's Louisiana Water Resources Research Institute entitled "Anticipating environmental problems facing hurricane debris landfills in New Orleans East." After reviewing Pardue's "white paper," I must respond to Dunne's article and to Pardue's paper.

Pardue raises concerns about the recently opened Chef Menteur landfill. DEQ has addressed these concerns repeatedly, starting when the clean-up efforts began last year and during the weeks after the landfill opened. In that regard, his paper offers nothing new to us. Unfortunately, LEAN trumpets Pardue's concerns in their attempt to shut down a much needed and environmentally sound landfill.

According to Dunne, Pardue "said his biggest concern is state officials have apparently ignored a lot of science done in the past 10 years that questions the safety of construction and demolition landfills like the recently opened Chef Menteur and Old Gentilly landfills." To the contrary, career scientists and engineers with DEQ, EPA, Army Corps of Engineers and Centers for Disease Control have considered a body of science, laws and regulations relevant to landfills. The agencies have weighed all practical options in the collection and safe disposal of unprecedented quantities and variety of debris following last year's hurricanes.

Pardue writes that "a major opportunity to recycle and divert materials is being missed." To date, DEQ and its partners have gathered and recycled more than 850,000 white goods (refrigerators, washers, stoves, etc.), 650,000 electronic goods, and 175,000 small engines. We have extracted and collected more than 50,000 pounds of Freon. We have collected and disposed of 4 million hazardous waste containers and nearly 20 million pounds of household hazardous wastes. We have had to address the gathering and recycling of nearly 100,000 vehicles and more than 13,000 vessels not addressed by insurance companies. In my opinion, we have missed no "major opportunities."

DEQ and its partners have accomplished significant waste recovery, recycling and removal while minimizing the impact on the recovery and rebuilding process. We believe many of the processes and procedures that were developed for the handling of debris and demolition wastes from Katrina and Rita will become the standard for other disaster response actions in the future.

The challenges faced in the devastated areas are being viewed by some in a very simplistic light. But, **this is not business as usual**. We are confronted with unprecedented volumes of storm debris and a strong desire for expedited cleanup and recovery of storm-damaged areas of our state. Although we have already cleaned up nearly 20 million tons of debris, we are presently facing the challenges of potential

demolition and disposal of 50,000 flood-damaged structures identified by Orleans Parish officials. This will generate millions of tons of additional C&D wastes.

In articulating his concern about the amount of household hazardous waste in the hurricane debris stream, Pardue writes that “An EPA official acknowledges that these activities will only divert a small proportion of the HHW (household hazardous waste) stream (estimated at 20-30 percent).” He references this as a comment by David Romero, EPA to CNN on October 5, 2005. LEAN, some in the media and Pardue have taken Mr. Romero’s comments entirely out of context and have inappropriately referenced them to serve their arguments against the Chef Menteur landfill. Mr. Romero has provided us with a letter explaining his comments and how they have been misused. It will be posted along with this message to our website. But to set the record straight in this forum, I will quote part of the letter. “The 20-30 percent estimate I offered the reporter reflected my initial assessment of the **total amount of household hazardous waste that we would be able to recover from the immediate Slidell area in the wake of Katrina.** Floodwaters in Slidell were particularly high relative to other impacted areas, and this estimate reflected my assessment of the waste recovery effort in a very limited geographic location.”

Dunne writes, “The report points to a DEQ air test that recorded concentrations of hydrogen sulfide exceeding 400 parts per billion. That’s four times higher than the American Industrial Hygiene Association Emergency Response Planning standard for one-hour exposure to individuals, who can experience mild health effects or a clearly defined objectionable odor.” However, there is **no record** of a 400 ppb reading. The report references “a detection limit of 400 ppb.” Air sampling done on May 24 tested for 42 contaminants. All were below health risk standards.

Finally, Pardue implies that these landfills could create legacy issues for New Orleans like the Agriculture Street Landfill. This area did become a Superfund site after Hurricane Betsy. At that time all wastes, hazardous and non-hazardous, were brought to one location. However, in 1965, EPA and DEQ did not exist and there were few environmental regulations. In the current clean-up operations, great effort is being expended to separate hazardous and non-hazardous wastes for appropriate disposal. You cannot repeat what happened in 1965 using cleanup methods being employed today.

I invite Pardue to visit with us if he continues to have or identifies additional concerns, so that we can address the real challenges as opposed to adding to confusion and potentially impeding much needed recovery efforts.

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Secretary